

Tips, Tricks, & Techniques:

Substituting one yarn for another, for love or money:

Finding the gauge, using YarnDex and Google, and making your sweater for a fraction of the price:

Almost all patterns specify a brand of yarn, which you may or may not like, and which may or may not be available, since many yarn companies have their pattern books in print and available long after the yarns themselves have been discontinued.

And many patterns specify yarns that are beyond the average knitter's budget.



As I write this, for instance, I am looking at a Michael Kors take on a long Aran fisherman sweater in the Fall 2006 Vogue Knitting, a perfectly beautiful and not terribly difficult pattern, that specifies 15-18 50 gram balls of Filatura di Crosa/Tahki-Stacy Charles *Elen Cashmere* (cashmere/wool/silk/viscose) for which the manufacturer's suggested retail price is \$17.95. That's roughly \$270 to \$325 for yarn alone, according to the listing on <http://www.yarnDex.com> This is a major industry source that lists the manufacturers of most available yarns, and shows the current color cards of the yarns themselves.

Here, the gauge for Eden cashmere is listed as 22 stitches/4 inches in stockingette. That makes it more or less a DK weight. Could you get the same cashmere yarn, and the same soft and luxurious look and feel for less money? Let's find out.

Now, go to YarnDex's search panel. You'll want to try cashmere first. Click "advanced search," enter "DK" and "cashmere." Twenty choices come up, but none of them significantly reduce the yarn cost, unless you are looking at blends; one, Debbie Bliss Cashmerino Baby is \$7.95 a ball, for a cost of \$120 to \$135. That might work, or you can try again.

Is there a good DK weight alpaca? Soft, luxurious, less costly than cashmere.

Click "advanced search" and enter "DK", "alpaca", and then "search", and then start clicking through the shade cards on the page until you find the first one that works to 22

stitches/4 inches. Or, if you think, as I do, that the sample sweater is too loosely knit, one that knits to 20 stitches/4 inches, and knit on #6 instead of the specified #7 in the pattern. Indiecita, a Plymouth brand, was the first one I encountered. Baby Alpaca DK comes in a variety of colors, at a suggested retail price of \$6.99 a ball for a 50 gram ball. That would make a soft, lovely sweater for between \$105 and \$120 in yarn.

If that's still more than you want to spend, look at other DKs. There's a Cascade/King Cole merino mix called Dolce, same gauge, at \$5 suggested retail. That would be \$75-90 for the yarn.

Now quit YarnDex, and Google in the name of the yarn you want. Check the merchants who have it for sale. Some won't have the color you want; some will sell only in packs of 10 balls, but you'll find it, can order it, and can make the sweater for significantly less than what the designer/yarn company specifications call for.

You can do this in your local yarn store only if the store is arranged with some regard to gauge, and then arranges by manufacturer within a given gauge. Most, however, arrange largely by manufacturer, which means you'll have to search the whole store, not just a section, to find a good substitute for a yarn that you like and can afford.

Love the pattern, but not the yarn? Find a substitute

"Where do some of the patterns come from, and what are the designers thinking?" you keep asking yourself, as you look through the pages of the magazines, or websites such as the late YouKnitWhat? and its several successors—guilty pleasures with no calories, the nearly ideal combination. Even these don't address the time/money equation for what they show.

I don't know what companies and designers are thinking, but often it seems to me that manufacturers or importers often have a specific yarn, want a design created for it, and don't really do a very good job of it.

As I write this I'm looking at the Yosemite Cabled Pullover from Trendsetter on the facing front page of Vogue Knitting's Fall 2006 issue. It may "make a colorful statement," as the ad says. But I think it's a mess, done-ill advisedly in a variegated and truly huge thick-and-thin yarn that makes it impossible to see the cable work. I think there is just too much going on in this, including excessively long sleeves. It looks messy, especially on a model with a bad case of bed-head.



And a thick-and-thin yarn makes for lumpy looking cables anyway, and lumpy looking cables make the wearer look lumpy herself.

Now, how could you fix this? You could work a plain sweater without cables in the specified yarn—which would surely improve the lines of the sweater, and avert whatever fuss there might be with cabling. Or you could knit the same sweater in a plainer, smoother yarn, in a solid color or a tweed that would let the cables show. No lumps, either. Let's say you like the sweater, like the cabling, but want it plainer.

Trendsetter does not, as I write this, list its yarns on Yarnindex, but if you google in Trendsetter, you can find that Yosemite is truly a large yarn, with a gauge of 8 stitches/4 inches on #17 needles—a super-bulky. It's an acrylic/wool blend that is listed at \$12.85 a ball on yarnmarket.com. This Yosemite Cabled Pullover requires 10 skeins in a medium size--\$128.00 in yarn.

Cabling tends to work best in a smooth single color or tweedy yarn, however, so let's go back to Yarnindex and try to find something that knits to the same gauge, but will show off the cabling.

Using "advanced search" and "super-bulky", one can find plain colors and smooth texture in Classic Elite (Reynolds) Waterspun Weekend all wool, in some nice plain colors, at the same gauge, with the same needles, at \$8.95 a ball; Karabella's Brushed Alpaca at \$17.95; Rowan Big Wool at \$14.95; Plymouth Encore Mega (acrylic and wool) at \$5.29; Mondial's Kross merino at \$14.95; Katia's Nordic in pure wool at \$13.95; Gedifra's Scarlet, a little smaller (2.25 stitches/4 inches) but in some great tweeds at \$7.50 in acrylic and wool. From \$128.85, you can get the cost down to \$75 in Gedifra, \$85 in Classic Elite, and \$52.90 in Plymouth.

So there you are. Lots of choices for a pullover you could knit in a weekend or three, and much better than specified.

If you want more comprehensive information on this subject, please see Jenna Wilson's comprehensive Knitty.com article on the subject of substitution and its many subtleties at <http://www.knitty.com/ISSUEwinter03/FEATwin03TBP.html>

Knit on,

Pat Feeley